

Partners Develop Pilot Program for Stream Monitoring

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The subwatersheds of the headwaters of the Jones Falls contain less than 10% impervious cover. A quick contrast to the areas less than 10 miles downstream where the urban stream is channelized and winds beneath the Jones Falls Expressway before it enters a tunnel just prior to discharging in Baltimore's Inner Harbor. For a 58-square-mile basin, the Jones Falls watershed contains a diverse array of conditions and serves as an excellent location for piloting a volunteer stream monitoring program.

Jones Falls Watershed Association (JFWA) and Center for Watershed Protection began working with Baltimore County's Department of Environmental Protection and Resource Management to pilot an adopt-a-stream program in September 2002. The goal was to establish a network of volunteers that would walk the streams throughout the watershed and provide feedback to the Association and the County on the condition of the streams, areas potentially in need of restoration, and any emergency conditions that might exist.

Center for Watershed Protection (CWP) brought their expertise and knowledge of programs around the country to develop a template with multiple levels of stream adoption. The key benefit of the program was to increase the number of stream miles observed on a regular schedule. While detailed information is valuable, the program needed to provide an "entry-level" opportunity for citizens inexperienced in stream monitoring to become involved and feel comfortable with the commitment to adopt. The first level of adoption essentially asks volunteers to collect trash that they see in and around the stream and report any unusual circumstances. The most involved stream survey asks for extensive information on the physical condition of the stream to be reported.

Jones Falls Watershed Association staff and a core group of volunteers were then trained to implement the program and worked through the forms for the different levels of adoption and the conditions that each level identified for reporting. For the past year, JFWA has been recruiting and training volunteers for the program. Volunteers enrolling in the program are providing feedback on the training, materials, and handouts to improve implementation for other watersheds in the future. Currently, approximately 6 miles of stream have been adopted by 54 volunteer leaders.

